Special Edition

INSIDE STORY

"Eye of the Beholder"

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(SHOW OPENING)

Audio montage of 1960s shows over TV aerials.

NEWTON MINOW: Is there one network president in this room who claims he can't do better? Is there at least one network president who believes that the other networks can do better?

HODDING CARTER: (Over SHOWS - SOT) The year was 1961. Not a very good year for television. Not according to Newton Minow (SHOWS-SOT) In the eyes of the Government's chief regulator, television was "a vast wasteland."

(SHOWS - SOT)

SENATOR ABRAHAM RIBICOFF: A child watches what he is permitted to watch and listens to what he is permitted to listen to. If he is permitted to sit like a vegetable, persuing moronic murders, and ceaseless crimes, he suffers; and his parents do too in the end.

(SHOWS - SOT)

SENATOR JOHN PASTORE: The idea that Mommy and Daddy can shut if off and that's the end of it - it won't happen. Because Mommy and Daddy likes to look at it too (SHOWS - SOT). And the point is, not to shut it off, but to turn it on. But to make sure that when it's turned on it is good.

(SHOWS - SOT)

NICHOLAS JOHNSON, FORMER FCC COMMISSIONER: I think it's time we in Washington say out loud the truth that all of us read in our mail from Americans in all walks of life: the men who are currently running commercial network television in this country are a vicious, evil influence.

(SHOWS - SOT)

GRACE BAISINGER, PRESIDENT - PTA: The PTA has already served notice that if the quality of programming does not improve on the basis of the results of the fall 1978 monitoring which will be released in early Winter, we will challenge the licenses of the five network-owned and operated stations.

(SHOWS - SOT)

CARTER: (Over SOT of Hill Street Blues) Twenty years after Newton Minow's indictment, the "vast wasteland" had become, in the eyes of other critics, a moral swamp, if not a menace to society.

REVEREND JERRY FALWELL: We're talking about dirt. We're talking about profanity, vulgarity, bedroom scenes, sex and violence that is obnoxious, damaging, non-constructive and demeaning to the American moral fabric.

CARTER: That judgement was delivered by the best-known preacher of the new religious right. Jerry Falwell had joined forces with a little-known minister from Mississippi who delivered a promise:

REVEREND DONALD WILDMON: Television is going to change. I mean, that's it. No ifs ands or buts about it. It is going to change.

CARTER: (Over monitoring training session) For the Reverend Donald Wildmon, change may come through a boycott of TV advertisers organized through his Coalition For Better Television. He has recruited and trained monitors to log programs both for sponsors and for content; for their use of profanity, violence and sexuality.

WILDMON: (Conducting training session) But now, if , if - you don't even have to see skin. I mean, you know, it could be exploitive, it could be exploitive, if she had on, well, let's take Charlie's Angels: the bra-less, running, you know, and bouncing. You know. If it seeks to exploit that, it's undue and unnecessary emphasis on the human anatomy. And it could be a man...

CARTER: Wildmon says thirty two hundred monitors are grading the new fall season. Their reports will be tallied this month and he claims, the results will show which advertisers sponsored the most offensive programs. Those companies could become targets of a boycott. Criticism of television is nothing new. Citizens groups have complained in the past about excessive TV violence, and they still do. Others have complained about the poor quality of programming aimed at children and they still do. But the critics we will examine tonight are different. Indeed, most of the established groups already oppose or disavow them. The new critics are motivated largely by relgious belief. They feel that television transmits values which are contrary to their most fundamental beliefs. And they threaten an economic holy war to change it. Are they the Ayatollahs of the religious right as one network executive put it, or do they reflect something deeper and more fundamental in the country. Is the tactic of boycott a legitimate one? Or is it theological terrorism and a step toward censorship. These are some of the questions. To find the answers, we began in Tupelo, Mississippi.

A small prosperous town, two hours south of Memphis on U. S. 78. Traditional, American values are important here. Including the church. There are 131 churches for the 57,000 people who live in Tupelo and surrounding Lee County. Elvis Presley was born here and on the streets, Elvis is better known than the Coalition. Don Wildmon may be making headlines elsewhere, but not at the local newspaper.

JOHN HUTCHINSON, NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI DAILY JOURNAL: Here at the Journal we don't feel really one way or the other. We don't feel like what he's doing is earthshattering but at the same time we don't feel like it's something that we can ignore, him being a home-town product. So we give him coverage. It's not front-page type coverage.

KAREN DOYLE, NORTHEAST MISSISSIPPI DAILY JOURNAL: I think he is very sincere about what he is trying to do. I also think that most of the power that he has gotten, and a large - I wouldn't say most - but a large portion of the power that he has gotten has come from over-reaction to what he was doing by the networks and from over-reaction to what he was doing by the national press.

CARTER: Why do they do that?

DOYLE: I don't know.

CARTER: Do you think that he is sophisticated enough to also be exploiting the media?

DOYLE: Certainly, certainly. I mean when someone hands you something like this, it's like a gift. They're handing him a platform to stand on and he needs to use it, he'd be a fool not to use it.

CARTER: (Over the Intro to Nightline) And Wildmon is using television.

WILDMON: We're angry. We're mad. I paid $800 for a new television set and I ain't gettin' anything fit to watch.

PHIL DONAHUE: (On the Donahue Show) The Coalition is planning a sponsor boycott for this fall's prime time season, so to speak.

WILDMON: That is a possibility, yes sir.

DONAHUE: And can you share with us the list of target shows?

WILDMON: No sir. We've never dealt with target shows. What we're concerned about primarily is the value system.

WILDMON: (On the Midday With Bill Boggs Show) A value system that says sex is a commercial product you can package and sell; a value system that says basically violence is a legitimate way to achieve your goals in life or to resolve conflict; a value system that says profanity is a way an intelligent person speaks when he becomes upset or angry or emotionally charged.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (The Charlie Rose Show) I want to see what's available. I don't want you to tell me what I can see.

WILDMON: You can. Wait a minute. Wait just right there. Now, that is, and I think you're a lovely lady, now surely anybody about as pretty as you are can't be dumb, because you either know... First of all, I don't tell you what you can watch. Only the networks tell you what options are available to you. You can watch anything. I told you when we first started: networks can show what they want to show, the advertiser can sponsor what he wants to sponsor, the viewer can view what he wants to view, and the consumer can spend his money where he wants to.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (On the Donahue Show) I also agree there's a lot of sex and violence on TV today, but when I see a program I don't want to watch, I turn it off. (APPLAUSE)

WILDMON: We can turn the television off, but that is not a solution. If I came to you and said, "I don't like crime in the streets," would you tell me, "Stay in your house?" (APPALUSE "YES")

CARTER: Off television, you might not recognized the United Methodist Minister leaving his home; many people in Tupelo don't. The Forty-three-year-old Wildmon takes pride in being a private person who keeps his family life -- his wife, four kids, and a dog named King Tut -- outside the public eye. He does talk about the night five years ago, when while watching television with his family, he turned off the set.

WILDMON: (Interview) I sat there and I recalled the changes that I'd seen in my society in the last twenty years: the magazines at the check-out stands, the movies, and other changes. And I sat there and I said to myself, "You know, they're gonna bring this into my home." And I, ah, I became mad. I experienced some righteous indignation. That's translated into holy anger. And holy anger is born out of love, not out of hate. I became mad. I became upset. And I said, "Look, this medium has the potential to be the most constructive medium in the history of mankind, but look where it's going."
The Chirstian perspective, the Christian values, the Christian culture, if you will, has been censored completely out on present, current network television programs. That has got to cease and desist. Somebody's views are going to dominate. Somebody's views are going to control. Television is out of whack, it's out of bounds. Christians in this country are a majority. They're a majority. Watching television, you don't even know they exist.

CARTER: (Over Old Time Gospel Hour control room) Wildmon may not see his kind of Christianity in prime time but from modern control rooms, using local stations, cable systems, satellites, even their own networks, nearly a hundred religious programs are syndicated each week. Half the population tunes in at least occasionally. When they do, they find that televangelists like

Jerry Falwell preach more than the old-time gospel.

FALWELL: (Preaching) I'm glad things are changing in this country. That's why they're marching on the sidewalks. We have, in a couple of weeks, the atheists, the American Atheists Society, will be marching on our sidewalk. And, let's see, in just another week, we have the gays who are coming here to march. We had the feminists a few weeks ago. And then the Communists and the Nazis will be coming, no doubt. And they're coming from everywhere, that's wonderful. Do you know why they're marching? Do you know why they're screaming bloody murder? Do you know why the pornographers and the abortionists are livid and angry? Because they know they are losing.

CARTER: (Over Billy Graham Crusade) Traditionally, televised religion has been more involved with saving souls than political issues. The top-rated shows, like Oral Roberts and Rex Humbard, still are. So is Billy Graham.

REVEREND BILLY GRAHAM: (Preaching) You flee to the cross, where you find forgiveness and safety and refuge and salvation and it's all free.

CARTER: (Over Billy Graham Crusade) But television isn't free. Last year, Graham's radio and television Crusades were budgeted at 10 million dollars.
(Over Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral) The soaring price of preaching on television drove many traditional churches off the air. But this mainline minister moved from a drive-in theatre in southern California to this "crystal cathedral" and onto a hundred and seventy five stations: The Reverend Robert Schuller.

REVEREND ROBERT SCHULLER: (Preaching) This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

CARTER: But it's the evangelicals and fundamentalists who are really taking off. The Christian Broadcasting Network is on 24 hours a day. Its biggest show, the 700 Club, mixes the religious message with a modern talk/variety format. The 700 Club even has a "spinoff" -- Jim Bakker's PTL Club -- which stands for "people that love" or "praise the Lord," is carried on a hundred and eighty stations.

CARTER: (Over EWTN Promos) Religious networks have grown with programs like this: EWTN, Catholic Satellite Network, carries this Seventh Day Adventist series. It's a melodrama with a message.

(SHOWS - SOT)

This is the opening of a TV special that takes a frightening look at America. Produced and narrated by a Texas evangelist who is a key link between the electronic church and the political right:

James Robison.

JAMES ROBISON: (From EWTN Special) There is a strange and terrifying reality, tightning its grip on the heart of America today. An impending disaster which threatens the very existence of our nation. As unbelievable as it may seem, there are forces at work which are dedicated to the total and absolute destruction of the traditional American family. These forces, which fight, oftentimes under the banner of Secular Humanism -- political movements -- are committed to wiping out the principles and values most Americans treasure.

CARTER: What's been labeled "secular humanism" is one target of some televised preachers. Another is television.

JERRY FALWELL: (Preaching) The people own the airwaves. Don't ever let anyone tell you that there's a nob on there, that you can turn it on or off. You should not have to turn it on or off, you own the airwaves. Let the networks do the turning on the other end before they dump the garbage on your living room. They have the responsibility. So, here we are today, year after year, becoming a little more permissive than the year before, dumping four letter words, and suggestive and risque settings right into your home, until television has virtually become unfit for human consumption.

CARTER: (Over Falwell's Lynchburg organization) Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour is only part of his communications operation in Lynchburg, Virginia. By television, radio, mail and by telephone, the appeal for support goes out. What came back last year was an estimated 63 million dollars in cash and checks. Many of the millions who watch evangelical programs, have contributed time and money to the Coalition For Better Television; an audience identified as mostly over fifty, mostly women. But as President of the Moral Majority, Falwell claims a broader base among people, he says, believe as he does.

FALWELL: (Interview) They believe in the family, they believe in the traditional, monogamous families, which begins when a man legally marries a woman; they believe that homosexuality is immoral; they, they believe - they're against the drug traffic, they're against excessive use of alcoholic beverages; they're against walking in and getting a high ball every time you enter the room, the thing that Mrs. Reagan spoke so articulately about; they're against honoring the dishonorable, and they would be willing to help us to improve the general lot of television. We don't think that we're ever going to get a hundred percent of what we want, and we shouldn't. We don't think that anybody else is. But we think that if we effectively coalesce, we'll see that television doesn't go to the dogs in the next ten years. And that is exactly where it was headed: right to the dogs.

CARTER: Who is the lynchpin in this effort?

FALWELL: Well, I guess Moral Majority raises more money than any of the organizations involved, and so, if and when monies are needed, I guess we get called on. But the others contribute as well, and we have made a commitment, if and when boycotts are necessary, to put two million dollars at least into the boycott. For example, if we were called and said, "Okay, the boycott begins X date," we would write to four and a half million families instantly, saying, "Here are the facts, here are the people, here are the products, here are the things we don't want to buy any more, here's why," and so forth, and so would all the other three hundred organizations. And, and then we would buy full-page ads across the nation, listing the public enemy number one, and his products, and urging the boycott. And we would get on TV and radio, and press conferences everywhere, and eighty thousand pastors next Sunday would preach on it, and would put it in the church bulletins and within thirty days the dust would be flying.

CARTER: The button that could start a boycott is in Tupelo where Donald Wildmon tabulates the results of his monitoring. We studied the last available list of about 300 Coalition member groups. We found that most are small: 200 people or less, most are in the South or Midwest, and that almost all of them are part of another movement -- the political new right.

JOHN LOFTON, CONSERVATIVE DIGEST: If there's one thing that the New Right, so-called, is about, it's coalition politics. That is joining hands and working with those people who share basic concerns on similar issues.

CARTER: Is the Reverend Wildmon part of that coalition?

LOFTON: I think this television issue is one of the important issues. Yes.

CARTER: The Coalition's political spectrum may be narrow, but according to opinion anaylist, Daniel Yankelovich, its call for a boycott could appeal to wider concerns.

DANIEL YANKELOVICH: There is a significant number of people, and the estimates are about one out of five, which is many millions of people, who would be prepared to take some kind of action. If you ask the question, "What are people concerned about in America today?" I would say that even though they are very concerned about the economy, very concerned about crime, if you probe beneath that concern, you find that the reason is a deeper concern about the moral climate.

CARTER: The fact remains, it was Falwell and his Moral Majority that gave prominence to the Coalition. A Moral Majority executive

is on the Coalition Board. But Wildmon says he's in charge.

WILDMON: I think there's been a misunderstanding and it's intentional on the part of certain parts of the media, to paint the Coalition as being a step-child of the Moral Majority, and let me say here that I am in agreement with much, if not most, of the goals that the Moral Majority want to achieve -- not all, but most. But the Coalition has never been a Moral Majority group.

ROBERT ALLEY, UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND: Well I think that it's all of one piece...

CARTER: Robert Alley, religious scholar and critic of Falwell, told Producer, Elisabeth Coleman, there may be more here than meets the eye.

ALLEY: The movement, the Coalition For Better Television, is a reflection clearly dependent upon the Moral Majority. There's no question of the tie-in there. If you can capture the medium, threaten it and bring it to heel, then you have accomplished a good deal in your effort to achieve political and social ends.

CARTER: Political and social ends appear to be what most groups in the Coalition are after. Most of them come together in the Pro-Family-Movement -- right-to-life groups that oppose abortion, others that oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, some concerned with textbook review, sex education, and pornography. They are natural allies or members of the Moral Majority, and provide mailing lists and monitors for the Coalition. There's an overlap of interests and membership. Lottie Beth Hobbs is an officer of the Pro-Family Forum, the anti ERA Eagle Forum and the Coalition For Better Television.

LOTTE BETH HOBBS: I do think it reaches a point, that people who want to bring what we consider to be social garbage into the homes of America, should not be allowed to do so. I think there is such a thing as public morality. I think there reaches a point that the public interest, the good of the people supercedes each person's wishes.

CARTER: In a suburb of Fort Worth, Texas, Mrs. Hobbs recruited these monitors for the battle she thinks is long overdue.

HOBBS: We saw, back a number of years ago, the very purpose of television being changed, and I think the people that are at the head of it, and I think you're very well aware of that fact, deliberately set out to use television as an instrument for social change. And therefore, it is no accident that the value system that is now being portrayed on the screen is different from the value system that we saw ten years ago or twenty years ago. That is no accident. It's a planned thing.

CARTER: Do you see what television has in the way of programming as conditioning the society around us, or responding to it?

BOB ARCHER, MONITOR: Oh, absolutely. In fact, the other night on television, I was watching Walter Cronkite. And he made a statement that made me want to throw my shoe through the television set. He made a statement saying "The law of evolution." Evolution is a theory, and he is propounding it to be a law. And that just made me sick.

FRANK SCOTT, MONITOR: I think primarily, it's just mindless. Most of the TV shows on are, I know they're for entertainment, but it's not like it's educational. It's not inspirational. You just sit and watch and it's blah. Also, I'm concerned about sexuality and violence on TV, so that's my primary concerns about it.

LINDA ARCHER, MONITER: But I object to the exploitation of sex -- especially as a woman. I'm married, and I love my husband very much, and that part of our relationship is extremely important to us. But it's not to be exploited, and it's certainly not entertainment.

CARTER: Why don't you just turn it off?

BOB ARCHER: We do.

LINDA ARCHER: Maybe that's one of the reasons we're here.

CARTER: (Over Wildmon at training session) Wildmon rarely trains monitors in person. But because we were there, so was he. Monitors work in groups of two, covering each network's prime time schedule. Wildmon's methodology has been questioned, but he defends the validity of his results:

WILDMON: (Training) Please place a number one or a score mark, for each suggested sexual intercourse scene shown under the approprate heading: "Inside Marriage," or "Outside Marriage." You do not have to see the sexual intercourse act, obviously at this point on television, you don't. You only have to be left with the opinion from the show that sexual intercourse occured. And turn the sheet back over.

Please place a number one or a score under the Jiggly column. Each time the camera places undue and unnecessary emphasis on the human anatomy: breast, or buttocks or legs. This can be in conjunction with the suggestive sexual intercourse scene or apart from it. Now, down on the left-hand side, you see: "Jiggly Scenes" right? Let me tell you what we mean by that; precisely what we mean by that. We're talking about undue, in your opinion, undue and unnecessary emphasis on the human anatomy.

Now let me further clarify what we're talking about. A girl wearing a bathing suit, perhaps even a bikini bathing suit, on a beach, is, in itself, not a "Jiggly Scene". If, however, the camera zooms in on her breast, or her buttocks, or some part of her, to exploit, that is a "Jiggly Scene." Any questions?

(MONITORING WITH THE ARCHERS)

CARTER: Armed with their instructions, Linda and Bob Archer went home to practice on Love Boat.

LINDA: That was suggestive?

BOB: Yeah.

BOB: Between unmarried couples.

LINDA: Okay. Do you think that was suggestive?

BOB: Well, it was on his part. Sure.

LINDA: Yeah, but it didn't offend me. I mean, he's obviously got designs on the lady...

BOB: But you're not looking for things that offend you or don't offend you. You've gotta look at it objectively. Was it a sexual comment, him hanging out the Do Not Disturb sign?

LINDA: Well, if you put it that way, yeah, it was. On his part.

BOB: Alright, then mark it down. It's a visually suggestive comment.

LINDA: (Reading) "Sex Outside Marriage." Where would that be? "Suggested Sexual Intercourse"? Or - it wasn't "Suggestive Comments." It was...

BOB: Well, it's a visual comment. That's the thing.

LINDA: Okay. "Sexually Suggestive." Okay. "Outside Marriage." That other one was "Outside Marriage" too. I put this in the wrong place.

BOB: Okay.

CARTER: Commercials are important for the rating each advertiser receives. At the end, each program is graded on its constructive value.

BOB: It was entertaining.

LINDA: That's why you and I watch television, to be entertained.

And I was entertained. I liked it. I laughed, I thought it was funny.

BOB: What was the question again?

LINDA: Okay. "On a scale of zero to ten, with ten being tops, rate the program for its constructive contribution to society."

BOB: Well, how do you rate a, you know, a semi-sitcom to being constructive to society?

LINDA: Well put it on a, on a basis of... it wasn't destructive.

BOB: Well, I wouldn't give it any more than a five.

LINDA: No, but I - I would agree with you on a five, because I was entertained. But I wouldn't go higher than that.

(RICHMOND MONITORS)

CARTER: Sexual content is one of the concerns of the monitors. Last Spring at the Clover Hill Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, another set of monitors watched television for profanity. They were recruited and trained by the Moral Majority.

MAN: We primarily were asked to look for cursing and obscene words and that sort of thing. And I'm proud that we did what we did and glad that we did what we did. 'Cause as I said, it's very personal with me. I don't like it.

WOMAN: You take the word "God" now. On television they use that in several different ways, and it's "Oh, God!" and the impression it gives you there, that, of course, is that they're using it in a profanity way. And then there's "God" with a "damn" behind it.

WOMAN: We were told to use, or to score something, words that were not considered regular profanity like "whore," some of your street words.

MAN: If we were in doubt about any word, put it down anyhow. If it were a "heck" or a "darn" or whatever, and if we felt that it was offensive or we weren't sure, put it down. And there were some words that I put down, like the uses of "God". I wasnt' quite sure in my mind. I said now, did they mean it that way. I didn't have time to analyse it. I put it down anyhow. The computer - I don't know how they have the computer programmed to sort out all this information. I assume it took care of the mistakes that we may have made.

CARTER: The computer doesn't take care of everything. But Wildmon says he keeps an eye on what's reported by his monitors, just as they've kept an eye on their television sets.

MAN: I'd like to see it go back to teaching morals and having programs in there that teach a child, or teach an adult, not just children, but teach the adults, you know, decent morals to live by.

MAN: We're not, I don't think we're trying to censor TV. I think, or TV shows, I think what we're sayin', clean 'em up. Get the shows clean. Chips, that could be a good, clean constructive program, I would think, you know. And I think there's several and maybe "Bunker".

WOMAN: There's a lot of sex in that.

MAN: Maybe they, you can clean it up. You can make it presentable; you can make it worthwhile.

WOMAN: For years, I've had to sit and, just on edge all the time, because if a bedroom scene came on, I'd make some excuse to leave the room. I'm still doing that. I wanna be able to sit down and watch a TV program as a family without being embarassed.

MAN: But this gets down to a very personal level. I want the right to watch, or I have the right to watch something that I consider decent and wholesome. I've got that right, I don't know where it's written down, but it, personally, inside, Christ and my love for Christ and my Christianity has given me that right.

(SCENE FROM WKRP IN CINCINNATI)

MINISTER: Here's a list of records that have played on your station recently. Now all of them contain sexually suggestive, if not obscene, lyrics.

STATION MANAGER: Really?

CARTER: (Over continuation of Show) Earlier this year, even before the monitor reports were in, Hollywood was paying attention. At WKRP In Cincinnati, the station was confronted with a fictional minister and his monitors.

STATION MANAGER: But I still say these lyrics are dirty.

DISC JOCKEY: No offense A.C., but beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

BUSINESS MANAGER: May I say something? All my life I have seen these kinds of people that work; my aunt and uncle were like this. I'm here to tell you I have never seen a group of people who were so sure they were right about everything and so sure everybody else was wrong.

STATION MANAGER: This Doctor Bob Hollier isn't like that.

BUSINESS MANAGER: Yes, well, maybe. But that man did not come in here and say "We don't like this music so we're not going to listen to your station anymore." What he said was "We don't like this music, we don't want other people to listen to it anymore." Huh? There's a difference there. I call that censorship.

STATION MANAGER: I knew somebody was going to use that word.

(INTERVIEWS WITH NETWORK PRODUCERS)

DAVID GERBER, PRODUCER - TODAY'S FBI: It's easy to go after television. It's a simple thing to hit and you have scared people that just want to make a living that will, relent, you know, acquiesce to these kinds of forces. Every so often they'll stand up and make a speech. But internally they are worried about too much controversy in terms of involving their advertisers. Now the Moral Majority has come along. They're scaring a few people. They have a right to protest, let me tell you. They're protected by the First Amendment also. It is only the militancy that scares people - with their selective targets, and their threat of the boycott.

R. LEVINSON, PRODUCER - COLOMBO: I believe what Wildmon and Falwell are doing, if they are successful, will diminish the content and reduce television to the bland leading the bland and chewing gum for the eyes, and all the accurate criticisms of it that have been made over the years, and that we're beginning to get away from in small areas.

NORMAN LEAR, CREATOR OF ALL IN THE FAMILY: Perhaps what they are succeeding in doing is forcing writers to write about more bland issues. There is a difference between sex and human sexuality. There's a difference between a show...Because I've seen what they've attacked. They've attacked a number of shows just from what they've read about them , long before they were produced. Consequently, they took after, in the marketplace of ideas, ideas.

E. DUKE VINCENT, PRODUCER - STRIKE FORCE: The question is, "What does 'better' mean?" And in who's eyes. Is it better in the eyes of let's say the Moral Majority? And is the Moral Majority really a minority. Is it better in terms of entertaining 40 or 50 million people a night? Whose "better" is it?

RICHARD LEVINSON: I'm afraid that Reverend Wildmon doesn't trust his own people not to watch this material, so he comes after the creative community to cut it off at the source. Somebody said they want their children to stop watching but their children won't. So they're going to try and stop us from making it.

CARTER: In your case has there been any pressure brought to bear?

MICHAEL ROSS, PRODUCER - THREE'S COMPANY: Not a bit. Do you know why? 'Cause we're a hit show. We do very well. We do very well for the network. I'm thinking of the new shows coming on. I think they will be affected. I think the networks are very careful of what they are accepting for future air. I think they have been affected. Ah, and that's the beginning of the terror. Because if they are truly affected, and they really are being ultra careful, we're back to Father Knows Best, Ozzie and Harriet, "Hello Mon, hello Dad, have a cracker."

DUKE VINCENT: When you submit a script, they will send you notes on the script and ask you to delete certain things.

CARTER: Such as what?

VINCENT: Hells and damns.

CARTER: How so?

VINCENT: Well, for instance, let's say they will count in the script. You have six hells and you have four damns. They say that's too many hells and damns. Should be four hells and two damns. How they decide that. God knows, they don't know because they don't tell you which ones to take out. They just say "Decrease the amount."

DAVID GERBER: They are indeed paying more than lip service to what the Moral Majority want. They're being very careful about what they consider violence, what they consider too sexy and it starts down, I think, as I said, with the sales people working in on the development people and the current programming people and it finally comes up to us and they're becoming very, very stringent. So it's not an open fight where you go back and forth, you know, it's a, and I find that all three networks, speaking through associates of mine, and other producers, that there is a stringency here that we didn't expect this, this semester.

CARTER: So, the networks talk tough about they'll never back down, but the net effect of the pressure is that they're passing the word: cool it.

GERBER: Yup. They're speaking loudly with a soft stick.

* * * *

CARTER: Executives at all three networks have denied that the Coalition has changed their thinking or their programming. But one network President says there may have been some effect.

JAMES DUFFY, ABC: I think that's probably true to some degree, because those kind of themes may be overbalanced.

CARTER: So there were too many giggles and jiggles.

DUFFY: Could be. There was too much westerns at one time. Were too many westerns at one time. At one time, there were probably too many police shows. At one time, there were probably too many, perhaps, situation comedies. We have been accused, as you well know, of most everything that happens in our society. including being "a vast wasteland," you remember that quote.

CARTER: In the decisions that are made about television programming, is there no prevailing value system which helps to shape those decisions?

GENE MATER, CBS: Oh, there are some, obviously. For example, and, and some of them are quite obvious. You don't want the bank robber to escape scot free, for example. You don't want to go totally against the social standards, whatever they might be today.

CARTER: J. R. goes scot free.

MATER: Well, he got shot last year but...

CARTER: Not dead.

MATER: Not dead, that's true. But you know there's a perfect example. J. R. or Dallas. Dallas last year was, I think it had an average of a 55 share for the season. That means that 55% of all the television sets in use on a given Friday night were tuned in to Dallas. Now there are those that object to Dallas. Who shall we listen to?

CARTER: Donald Wildmon says the networks have a conspiracy, whether overt or implicit to keep Christian values off the air. Do you agree with that?

ROBERT MULHOLLAND, NBC: No. That's nonsense.

CARTER: He says that at almost every opportunity.

MULHOLLAND: Well, what I think he's really saying is that our programs don't reflect what he would like to see on the air all the time. We did a survey that showed that some people who class themselves as fundamentalists liked Dallas because of the sex in it, liked The Dukes of Hazzard because of the violence in it, disliked The Dukes of Hazzard because there wasn't sex in it, liked Dukes of Hazzard because there was sex in it, they - people react to television generally the same.

CARTER: Do you hear from your advertisers that they are worried about the kind of threatened pressures that the Coalition talks of from time to time?

JAMES DUFFY: Yes, we have heard from advertisers and they are concerned because they feel that they perhaps, if a boycott, if a boycott were successful, could be injured. There probably are more advertisers but minimally, this year, that perhaps put Three's Company or another show, a Dallas or whatever, on a list and said, "We'd rather not be in it." But Three's Company is sold out. For the year. There are other advertisers who are not intimidated.

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CARTER: One advertiser who did drop Three's Company is General Foods -- the second biggest spender on television. The biggest, Proctor and Gamble, said it would listen closely to the Coalition's complaints. But General Foods says it hasn't been intimidated.

ANDREW SCHRODER, GENERAL FOODS CORPORATION: We're not seeking shows which have an absence of sex or violence. We're looking for shows that treat those themes and even other controversial themes appropriately. We're currently participating in Dallas which is, again, a show that our adversaries sometimes criticize us for participating in. That show is subject to again, as all of our programming is, an episode-by-episode review. There will be certain episodes that we will not participate in.

CARTER: Choosing their spots among the thousands of television programs is crucial to all advertisers. One place they come for help is the Leslie A. Harris Company of New York. Here, every program is pre-screened according to guidelines supplied by clients who are then advised about potential problems. The Harris Company says some sponsors tightened guidelines on sex and violence after the Coalition began talking boycott. Advertising is a big investment. On a successful show like Love Boat or Three's Company, commercial time costs as much as 5,000 dollars a second. To learn how advertisers watch television, we looked at some shows with screener DeWitt Mallary, starting with the same Love Boat seen by the Archers in Texas.

MALLARY: Well, this would probably get a mention to the sponsors. I mean, the implication there is very clear that there's stuff going on behind that door that's not shown, and that is the sort of thing that sponsors would want to know about in advance.

CARTER: General Foods stayed aboard the Love Boat but bailed out of this TV movie: "Cagney and Lacey".

MALLARY: There you have a couple, who it's established are not married, it's a one night stand sort of situation. (SHOW - SOT) There's a lot there to potentially offend certain viewers.

(SHOW - SOT)

CARTER: Three's Company is high on the ratings, and high on the Coalition's list of offensive programs.

(SHOW - SOT)

MALLARY: This is a good example of what makes our job difficult. Because it is not up for us to decide or comment on, whether that's funny or not. I mean, to you or to one of our screeners that might be funny and it might even be just the 1981 equivalent of some sort of classic bedroom farce or something. Whereas to someone else, somewhere else, that might be the sort of thing that they didn't want their children to see.

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CARTER: (Over SHOWS - SOT) The new season has opened to its usual audience of millions. Some see in the new season an old theme: violence.

(SHOWS - SOT)

FALWELL: My concern on violence doesn't go to the extent that I feel every time the FBI accosts a criminal that, or there's a shoot-out, that that's going to create a shoot-out in the streets. I don't think the response from violence is commensurate with the response from gratuitous sex. I will certainly be cautious about getting into the violence fight unless I feel that they're creating problems in the country, that they really in fact are generating violence in the streets, violence in America. I don't think the networks want to do that. I can't imagine anybody who wants to do that.

CARTERL On the question of violence, Dr. Falwell, you sound like an agnostic.

FALWELL: Well, I probably am. I don't think there's been yet a provable finding on what translates from the television screen into real life in the area of violence.

WILDMON: If it sells products, it sells values, ideas, morals, motives, attitudes. It sells everything, and it does, and it can't keep from it, by its very nature. To say that, to say that the violence on television doesn't affect us, you'd have to say that the sex on the television doesn't affect us or profanity on television doesn't affect us, or anything else on television doesn't affect ut. It does affect us.

CARTER: (SHOWS - SOT) The new season has also included the family, although sometimes in unorthodox settings.

(SHOWS - SOT)

But back this year were Dynasty, Knotts Landing, Flamingo Road and other series the Coalition had rated high in sex, violence and profanity.

(SHOWS - SOT)

And there were new TV movies for the Coalition monitors to consider.

(SHOWS - SOT)

Still, many TV critics agreed, this season was cleaner, if not safer; a season however, that also created an even more significant disagreement between Donald Wildmon and Jerry Falwell.

FALWELL: I think that the people of this country, the moralists of the country -- and the advertisers, the Owen Butlers, the Proctor & Gambles and so forth, the Warner Lamberts, have won a victory. They've convinced the networks that you ought to clean up your act, and you ought to help the country up, not down, and do what should have been your responsibility without our suggestion.

CARTER: What I hear you doing is declaring victory.

FALWELL: No, no question.

CARTER: You're saying that this season, you're saying that this season has now turned around radically?

FALWELL: I think that's a true statement.

CARTER: So we're never going to see a test of whether a boycott would be effective?

FALWELL: Well, I won't say never, that's a long time.

CARTER: Let's say we're not going to see a test of whether a boycott would be effective come this January.

FALWELL: As I see it now, unless there's a radical turn-around within ninety days, sixty days, I don't think there'll be a boycott.

WILDMON: We know a boycott's coming.

CARTER: The disagreement about what's on the air has led to a disagreement about what's in the air. For Wildmon, there's no doubt it's a boycott -- even though before leading the Coalition, he had tried several boycotts with limited success. He called off a threatened Coalition boycott last spring, when he thought sponsors were cooperating. Now he sees no other way.

WILDMON: I mean that's it. This is it. No playing around. There's a lot at stake. If you got that much at stake, then you ought to be as prepared as you can be.

PRODUCER ELISABETH COLEMAN: And you're absolutely sure there's going to be a boycott?

WILDMON: No question about that. The only question's when.

CARTER: There's no question in Wildmon's mind about his monitoring results. They tell him nothing's changed.

WILDMON: This is the ratio. The ratio is derived by taking a total number of sex incidents and dividing it, dividing that by the number of units of thirty-second commercials or the equivalent thereof, into it. To be perfectly honest with you, we've been doing this for five years, and I really don't see any change. Like I think I said to you earlier, the problem is not sex and violence, the problem is the value system. And I don't perceive any change there.

CARTER: Wildmon denies having a hit list but he does attack specific shows -- some even before they are broadcast.

CARTER: You are saying that there are some shows which simply should not be shown, no matter what...

WILDMON: No matter what. If you want to interpret it that way, you know, it's into a problem of semantics, yeah, if you want to put it that way, and I'm not uncomfortable with that and I don't think you're trying to make me feel uncomfortable. Some shows probably, we would certainly be better off without them, as a country.

CARTER: Is there anything that anybody can do right now on the networks or sponsor side, to stop a boycott come January or so?

WILDMON: I think obviously there are some things that could be

done to stop, you know, to cancel one. But I'm not of an inclination to believe that anything will be done. In fact, I get the opinion that the networks might really want a boycott. And then it will not be successful, and then we'll be out of business. I really think sometimes that's their thinking.

CARTER: If a boycott is called, are you going to change anything?

MATER: No.

CARTER: Do you expect a boycott to be successful?

MATER: No. Absolutely not.

MULHOLLAND: The boycott is really not against television, it's against certain, specific products in programs. It's, it's really too complicated for people to do that. And I don't think mechanically it could work, but more than that, I don't think that the people who the Reverend Wildmon says he represents are ready to carry out exactly what he says they will do. I doubt that.

CARTER: You ready for the test?

MULHOLLAND: Sure.

WILDMON: I think what's coming in this country is gonna be a real serious ugly clash of values. And it's gonna be long, and it's not just television. You, can find it in nearly all areas of our society. Television is the most immediate, and it's the one that reaches the most homes, and it is the instrument chosen to propagate the faith. But I think that a very serious confrontation is apparent between the two value systems.

CARTER: (Over Strike Force set) Donald Wildmon has chosen his battleground, but on the sets where television is made, it's business as usual. How that business is affected will be the ultimate test of Wildmon's campaign to change television.

The Coalition, the networks, the advertisers -- all sides consider themselves accountable to a wider public, the public that watches television. Accountability is also a concern of Dr. Everett Parker, of the United Church of Christ, a long-time observer of both religion and the media.

CARTER: Is there some value system at the networks that shapes their program decision?

PARKER: Money. I think that basically, that is the only value that's really applied in the Broadcasting field. To make the most profit with the least expense.

CARTER: Is it your experience that the Networks will listen to sweet reason?

PARKER: No. Not at all. If they did, they wouldn't be in the trouble that they are now from the threats of boycott from these fundamentalist groups. And of course, they don't know how to judge the power of the fundamentalists, because they don't know anything about religion.

CARTER: If censorship comes, the networks will have brought it on themselves?

PARKER: I'm afraid that that's true. They will be as much responsible for it as the people who want to do the censoring. And we can't tolerate that in this country. We cannot tolerate any group that wants to censor, and we can't tolerate any group having control of our communications media who will accept censorship. And that worries me, too, because I would much rather have them say "Well, you know where you can go," and go ahead and do as they please, and I wish that these companies had the guts, if they really believe in the rotten programs that they let their names be attached to, I wish they would have the guts to go on doing the programs and take a chance on their products, to uphold the Constitution of the United States.

CARTER: Do you think that anybody really ought to be afraid that the efforts of the Coalition and similar groups could lead to censorship?

PARKER: Oh, of course. You cannot help but feel that people who have openly declared, as the Moral Majority has, that they want to take over the government, that they want their policies to become the policies of the country, that everybody shall follow whatever moral standards they may want to set. So I think a group that is that determined is not going to let programming on television that they don't want to have on the air, if they ever get power.

RICHARD LEVINSON: I don't thing they want censorship. But as a by-product of the nature of this system, we may wind up getting it. And I don't want the networks to fiddle with my scripts, I've been fighting them for years. I don't want the Coalition to fiddle with my scripts. I don't want anybody to fiddle with my script. If the viewer doesn't like what I do, he has every right to turn me off.

JAMES DUFFY: If a boycott scenario were successful with prime time programming, against a given advertiser, supposing it were successful and put that advertiser out of business, or way down and he lost a lot of money and they made their point and so forth,

what's next? Could it be news programming? Could it be - political philosophy? Could it be a religious philosophy? Is that what our country is all about? What are the fundamental principles of this country?

WILDMON: I don't know where I'm going, but I have reached the point, and I've, I may not even ought to say it publicly, because a lot of people would not understand, and, and, and this is a point where the networks can pop me real good, if I make a state, I have to be very careful of the statement I make in public, because they'll all come back to haunt me. The Lord has more in mind here than television.

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HODDING CARTER: (On camera) The confrontation is real. It is also apparently irrepressible. Network television is geared to the bottom line. What succeeds is good; what doesn't is bad. The Coalition's crusaders march to a different drummer; they embrace an absolute standard of right and wrong. A show which doesn't meet that standard is bad. Period.

There's nothing illegal, immoral, or un-American about a boycott. But it's hard to mobilize a lot of people in this distracted society. More important, the results could be self-defeating, or worse. On the one hand, a successful boycott might reduce the number of shows available to everyone, rather than producing the kinds of shows the Coalition says it wants. On the other hand, it could result in television being cut to a straight-jacket which suited the particular measure of only one faction.

But these concerns are almost irrelevant at this point. It seems obvious that television is not going to change enough to suit at least some members of the Coalition For Better Television, and that a boycott will be called. If that happens, the choice, as with television itself, is up to you. You can turn it on, or you can turn it off.

For Inside Story, I'm Hodding Carter.